Tribute to Cary J. Lambert, MD

I have always found it difficult to write a tribute to a dear friend. Those who knew the deceased expect all aspects of his personality and achievements to be mentioned. And those who didn't must be sufficiently informed. Yet I did volunteer, because I firmly believe that very few people deserve this page as much as Jake Lambert.

I met him as an associate to Drs. Ben Mitchel and Maurice Adam in 1972, when I came to Baylor as a fellow in the golden era of cardiothoracic surgery. Although short in stature with a mischievous expression on his face, he commanded attention because of his intelligence, abundant energy, and ubiquitous presence. A superb technical surgeon employing innovative methods, he was the backbone of the whole service.

Our first encounter was an unhappy one. When we scrubbed together, he kicked me out of the operating room! "You are excused," he said in his distinctively nasal southern drawl. "I cannot tolerate your dramatic Mediterranean movements!" That same evening he called me back, and sitting on the lawn in front of Jonsson Hospital, he formally apologized. After that, we became friends for life.

We kept in touch during my long training travails in Boston, Richmond, and London. Always astute and progressive, Jake believed that heart transplantation must soon come to Baylor; in 1984, he was the force behind my coming to Baylor to start the program. Unfortunately, a series of administrative misadventures led to his resignation before we had a chance to work together.

If I were to describe the defining hallmark in Jake's life, I would use the word *controversy*. He was greatly admired and loved by his friends and rejected only by those who didn't know him well. He respected authority and discipline, yet he tweaked the establishment's tail. He revered his almost tyrannical father, who once drove his truck over Jake's bicycle because it had been left in the driveway. He profoundly respected his Birmingham chief, Dr. C. Lyons, who semiseriously told him that his becoming a cardiac surgeon would be the greatest disaster in medicine. He adored his authoritative chief, Dr. Ben Mitchel, yet he would repeatedly embarrass him by smoking under a "no smoking" sign in Baylor's corridors. Being a truly academic surgeon, he selflessly and tirelessly taught residents and fellows everything he knew, yet he belonged to the private practice.

I would be amiss if I didn't repeat what Jake wrote in his last letter to me, which probably best describes this uniquely delightful and controversial friend: "Maybe what they say about being a southerner is true: he is forever in a quarrel with himself." For us, there never was a quarrel, for Jake Lambert was a truly good man, generous and hospitable to a fault. May he, at last, rest in peace.

—PETER A. ALIVIZATOS, MD

Former director of cardiothoracic transplantation
Baylor University Medical Center

See also the obituary on page 405.